

City of Rockville Commission on the Environment
December 9, 2008 Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Faith Klareich (FK), Seth Adams (SA), Steve Cardon (SC), Michelle Clark (MC), David Davis (DD), Kris Dighe (KD), Beri Kravitz (BK) and Tolulope Odunlami (TO).

Absent: None.

Also in attendance: Staff Liaison Nate Wall (NW); Mark Charles (MCh) – Division Chief of EMD;
Applicants for Commission Vacancy: Toni Bailey, Christine Davidson-McCord, Dominique Lorang and Peter Yook.

1. Welcome, News and Agenda Review

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm in the Black Eyed Susan Room at Rockville City Hall.

FK announced that there was the possibility that the Commission may enter into closed session to discuss the Commission vacancy near the end of the meeting.

Toni Bailey, Christine Davidson-McCord, Dominique Lorang and Peter Yook all introduced themselves to the Commission and expressed their interest in serving in the vacant Commission seat. FK then invited everyone to enjoy the holiday snacks, and allow for conversation between the Commissioners and applicants.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

KD moves to approve November 12th meeting minutes; DD seconds. Unanimous approval of November 12th meeting minutes.

3. Anti-Graffiti Ordinance Next Steps with Rec & Parks Advisory Board

KD outlined the anti-graffiti ordinance approach, and mentioned that it should be incorporated into an overall environmental beautification plan for the City to be optimally successful. FK mentioned similarities in the Keep America Beautiful Program, as well as in DC's approach to graffiti in its Clean City program.

The next step on the Anti-Graffiti Ordinance is to present the idea to the Rec & Parks Advisory Board at an upcoming meeting. KD is unavailable for the January 22nd meeting of the Rec & Parks Advisory Board, so NW will check on the February meeting date, likely February 26th (4th Thursday).

KD will have materials ready for the January meeting so that the Commission can vote on them prior to the February Rec & Parks Advisory Board meeting.

4. Working Group Updates

Watershed Protection Group

KD said that the watershed group met last night, and they have several items moving forwards. They are putting together training materials for stream monitoring, use a West Virginia program as a model. They are getting together a benthic macroinvertebrate stream monitoring workshop for February, and would like to hold it in a different part of the City from the nature center, where the last event was held. Possible venues: Thomas Farm (?), Rockshire, College Gardens ES, Senior Center. A second educational workshop on assessing stream habitat will likely be held in March.

The first volunteer monitoring event is scheduled for April. This may be scheduled in coordination with the Potomac Watershed Clean Up. Also, the program has been approved for Student Service Learning (SSL) credit for any students participating.

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Would like to hold contest to name the program – e.g., S.O.S. Save Our Streams, “Stream Warriors”, etc. Could announce winner as part of Earth Day events. Would like to see if schools could get involved in the naming contest. Winner could get a congratulations and photo with the Mayor.

High Performance Buildings Group

Will be meeting in January. They have some ideas for water conservation initiatives for the City. Also, are interested in pursuing the demonstration small wind turbine in Mattie Stepanek Park.

FK mentioned that New Mark Commons was pursuing some energy initiatives in their neighborhood to follow-up their successful tree planting project. This may be a project that the buildings group would like to help promote and duplicate across the City.

Community Outreach Group

DD said that the Community Outreach group held a teleconference on Thanksgiving week, mainly to discuss the current website and determine what other information should be more easily web-accessible. The group was curious what sort of Web 2.0 capabilities the City’s website could use to generate additional content / promote interactivity from users. NW didn’t know the status, but that could be a question to pose to JoAnn Grbach from the City’s Public Information Office when she attends the Commission’s January meeting. However, there will be the capability for on-demand streaming videos, just as Mayor & Council and Planning Commission meetings are on-demand right now.

Other priorities for the outreach group include effectively using the cable channel for announcements, education and recruitment of working group volunteers; putting together the “road show booth” for educational events; Science Day 2009; and continuing with the eco-fair concept. Additionally, the group identified the need for a fact sheet on Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) – the mercury issue, proper disposal, etc. Mark Charles mentioned that the City was now collecting CFLs as household hazardous waste. DD mentioned that the working group would also be interested in working with retailers to get disposal stations at the place of sale; perhaps City Hall and/or the library could have a drop-off site too.

FK mentioned that she had the opportunity to meet with the New Mark Commons applicants for the Environmental Excellence Award last Friday. They made a large effort, both in volunteer time and in financial commitment, to enhancing their neighborhoods tree canopy, including planting more than 1,000 trees. She hasn’t gotten to discuss it with the community outreach group yet, but this will be brought to the group for the January meeting. The idea is that the Commission can create vignettes on each EEA winner, and post that information online. This information can be used to highlight successful projects or techniques, and export them to other neighborhoods in the City (or other building projects, in the case of the 2000 Tower Oaks Blvd project).

FK also asked about the availability of a City conference call number. Is there any way of making a conference call comply with the Maryland Open Meeting law? Perhaps if the call-in number was publicized in advance of the meeting for anyone to join in? NW to check on this. [Note: It has been checked, and the City does have conference call capabilities to handle up to 100 people – more than enough for a “public conference call” meeting. So this may be an option for working group meetings in the future, depending on the agenda / objective of the meeting. NW]

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5. Staff Updates

Mark Charles, Chief of Environmental Management, re-introduced himself, and mentioned that starting next month he will be the Commission's new Staff Liaison – NW will move to liaison with the high performance buildings working group, Heather Gewandter will work with the watershed protection group and Amanda Rockler will work with the community outreach group.

The Environmental Management Division is also being reorganized – the water treatment plant, which is currently under Environmental Management, will be transferred out to the new Deputy Director of Public Works (position is yet to be filled). The Deputy Director will oversee and coordinate City utilities such as water and sewer, and also oversee the water treatment plant. In its place, several stormwater functions will move into the Environmental Management Division. The City will soon be hiring a Stormwater Program Manager to oversee the City's stormwater program, as well as a Stormwater Budget Analyst to help deal with the stormwater utility fee billing and budgeting issues. Additionally, the City's Refuse & Recycling program will also be moving over to the Environmental Management Division.

Mark Charles thanked the Commission for their endorsement of ICLEI's Blueprint for the Obama Administration on climate change, and said that the Mayor & Council unanimously voted to sign the Blueprint at last night's meeting. There will be a press release held in DC tomorrow to officially release the Blueprint.

EMD has been working on an update to the Sustainability Strategy; many projects have been completed within the last year, and many more have been started or continued. The tentative schedule for the update to the Strategy is to have written changes made in February, which will be shared with the Commission for comment before being presented to the Mayor & Council in late March for adoption in April.

The creation of Rockville's Green Building Program is still proceeding, albeit slowly – the significant edits to "green" the building code has been slowed in part due to the departure of the City's legal department. Expect a draft of the new building code in February.

David Levy and Ann Wallas of Long-Range Planning thanked the Commission for their comments on the Comprehensive Master Plan. It was first presented to the Planning Commission last Wed., December 3rd, with a more detailed follow-up scheduled for tomorrow evening. The general impression is that there are changes to be made to the CMP, including the addition of a new Water Resources element.

JoAnn Grbach from the Public Information Office was not able to attend tonight's meeting to describe the City's PIO process, and how the Commission can best participate in it. She will be on the agenda for the January meeting.

Earth Day isn't as far away as we think – now is the time to start getting things in place. The City is coordinating a calendar of events for that time period – we will want to get the watershed group's stream monitoring events included, and any other events the Commission can think of.

6. Discussion of Commission Vacancy

The discussion of making a recommendation to fill the Commission vacancy is tabled until the January meeting.

7. Wrap-Up and Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.